

Chapter 2

Harvey beeps her Oyster card on the way out of the underground. Usually, her impatience for the barriers to open come from her being late to her SoulCycle on the same street, but not today. Today she was just irritated. There are all these feelings brewing in her chest, prickling out in the tips of her fingers, making them dance over all kinds of things she passes by. The streets in SOHO are so short and narrow, that one has to have 20/20 vision to drive here, or even just to cross the street. Harvey slithered her way through two cars, crabbing onto her tote bag as the grey Mercedes nudges towards her, and the driver mouths her a nasty word. London is hit with yet another heatwave this summer and the sun hangs high in the sky, finding gaps between the tall buildings. Despite the warm weather she's wearing her long, dad denim shorts and a big dark blue college sweater with her white t-shirt poking out of at the collar. The heat alone scorches her covered skin, but in her determination she doesn't pay it much attention. She passes the bright yellow façade of Eggslut, her favourite brunch place. And looks the other way as she powers past the white doors of Soul Cycle Soho, to make sure she doesn't see any of her friends through the big windows. It almost feels illegal. This secret she has kept about her mother all life, has a door to its society a small leap away from where she usually spends most of her days. How has she not known? Her steps are firm against the pavement as she crosses several streets looking straight ahead. She zigzags her way through people and short streets and then takes a left and rounds a corner she has never thought twice of before. And there it is. A stone's throw away from Oxford Street, squeezed in between tall buildings a small, red bricked façade pokes through. Harvey is so used to the noise of the city that she only realises once it is gone, and somehow this was one of those moments when everything suddenly seemed completely still. The first thing she notices is that the church has a tower growing tall into the sky, much higher than its neighbouring buildings. How has she never heard of this building before? Her steps become lighter as she lines herself up perfectly with the gate. The red bricks are broken up with dark, verging on black bricks, making a pattern that runs over the entire building. The physical gate itself is made of steel but built into a brick arch that connects with the rest of the church. Harvey can't help but feel underwhelmed. This is the place? And it looks like something she used to build with Legos? With a huff she walks through the gates. The windows on the building are tall and slim framed by a yellow stone that makes Harvey roll her eyes. "Great, so this is exactly what I

used to make with Legos”, she mumbles to herself and pushes open the low, wooden door hidden in the corner of the building. An uneasy feeling follows her as she closes the door silently, by closing the door it means that she is trapped in here with the old scent of holy water. She has never liked churches, and knowing what she knows about her moms past life now she’s not surprised she was never thought to like them either. Her dad had revealed to her the evening before that real reason why her mom had broken away from her family and the time travel society was because their religion had become something she didn’t recognize from when she was a kid. He had said it as a warning, but without any details as to why their beliefs are so wrong, Harvey still decided to go this morning.

She stretches her neck long and up to try and take in all the illustrations on the walls and on the high ceilings. So, this is what the Church of Time looks like. Is it wrong that she expected more clocks?

She walks down the middle-isle, passing the wooden chairs with red bibles lying on each seat. It feels like they are looking at her. Every step made low shuffling sounds against the patterned tiles. Big arches ducks in between the chairs breaking up the open room into smaller areas. Everything is made symmetrically to make the alter in the front stand out. Every wall displays a new story. Harvey looks to see if she recognizes any of them but comes to realise they all look like the same bearded man with long hair, in different coloured cloaks. One of them holds a sheep, and she racks her brain for something it reminds her off. *Didn’t they talk about that one in A-levels?* She thinks and squints at the painting in hopes that that will make it easier to remember.

There are numerous more details to look at, but the alter pulls her closer. Her jaw drops open as she gazes up high at the man made of unpolished gold, hanging on the cross with his head dropped to the side. Jesus, the son. He is surrounded by wall-paintings of his disciples, all of them looking to him with questioning eyes. Normally she and Troy, her best friend, will cough out sneaky comments about their submissive looks, but now it is like her prejudice are left outside. She hears the men talking among themselves, whispers of reassurance, questions but no answers and words of worship. Has she ever seen the twelve disciples painted so frantic, she wonders. And stops for a second by her own train of thoughts. She has never known much about religion, and any image she has ever seen, she has never thought more of than colours on a canvas. Why does she suddenly now care how they feel?

But why aren't you answering them? Without any further thoughts Harvey walks up the two steps onto the little stage below Jesus until she is standing right below him. *Why are you so sad?*

The summer sun shines through one of the windows directly onto his golden body, heating him up to an unbearable temperature. Harvey feels his warmth, it burns her skin as if it is her the sunrays shine down on. The light reflects and then slims down to a smaller strip, highlighting his heart. She brings a hand to her own chest and burns herself on the soft fabric. "Was it all in vain?" The whisper leaves her lips as she mesmerized reaches. For what though? A part of her just has this need to take his hand.

"She's touching Jesus's hand!" A loud, shrill, kids voice rings out through the tall ceilings and snaps Harvey back into reality. She whips around, still holding on to her heart. An embarrassed young mother in a pretty blouse, and capri trousers grabs for her son's arm. The little joker runs between the chairs with a mischievous grin. Whether it was the boy that had made the rest of the church look Harvey's direction or if they had been looking for a while, she doesn't know.

There is only an elderly couple sitting with their hands folded together, and some touristy looking groups of people with cameras ready, so Harvey doesn't feel too self-conscious about what they saw of her. She just can't believe she did not notice them when she came, she swears it was only her in here a few minutes ago.

With uneven steps she makes her way down from the alter. Her hands go up to her cheeks, their burning as if she has a fever. She lets out a shaky sigh from the nausea growing in the pit of her stomach. Ironically, she says to herself, *Maybe it is true, the devil does go up in flames if he sets his foot in a church.*

More than anything she needs a glass of water, but there are no toilets or water taps to see, so she neglects it and keeps moving around. Her dad had told her to speak with the priest, but there is no priest to be found. So, what now?

It doesn't take long before her gaze graces over a confessional in the far corner of the church.

It looks like an old wooden wardrobe with two blacked out curtains hanging in front.

Maybe? She hesitates but slowly opens one of the curtains, but snaps back as a hand reaches out a hand. "I'm so sorry, I' jus—" The words stop as the hand uncovers a young man with short, brown hair sitting on a low chair inside the confessional. He wears all black with tailored trousers and a shirt that would make anyone looking break out in a sweat in this

heat, but his tan skin revealed he was no stranger to warm summers. “I didn’t mean to interrupt your confession.” Harvey continues as she catches herself stare for a few seconds too long. “I’ll just—” She points awkwardly behind her to signal that she’ll leave, which makes a wide smile break out on the guy’s face, much to her frustration. Even crouched down on a low wooden chair he looked good.

“Have you ever been in a confessional before?” Something twinkles in his blue eyes, but she doesn’t understand whether he is making fun of her or is just excited to help.

She chuckles sheepishly. “Does it seem like I have?”

The guy smiles again; this time it actually makes her break out in a sweat. “Here.” He gets out, revealing a strong and tall figure and holds up the other curtain for Harvey. “I’m your guide for the day.”

His words are meant to be calming, but it doesn’t do her any favours. Harvey looks between the little seat and the pretty guy. “So, *you’re* the priest?”

“Anyone with a leader position in the church have to a certain number of mandatory hours in the confessional. I promise it’s safe,” he adds quickly as her uncertainty grows more visible.

“Oh— Okay,” She moves under his hand and steps in before reconsidering. “But I ruined it, didn’t I?” Harvey whips around, her breath stops in her throat from how close the stranger suddenly is. “I’m not supposed to know who you are.”

“Don’t worry, I don’t know your name and neither do you. One more face in the crowd won’t make any difference.” He smiles reassuringly, before closing the curtain in front of her again. Even though it’s just a piece of fabric, an urge to break free from the tiny dark room washes over her. *It’s okay*, she soothes. The confessional is surprisingly cool as no sunlight manages to get to it here in the corner. Harvey places her palms on the walls before sitting down, her elbows won’t stretch further than a ninety-degree angle.

The floor creaks as he steps into the other room and Harvey takes a calming breath. It comes easier to her here in the dark. It sounds like a little wooden drawer opens next to her ear.

“Hello?” She asks.

“What would you like to confess my child?” She frowns at the awkward words, as if she hadn’t just seen that he was only a few years older than her.

“I— I don’t know.” She sighs and rubs her face. “This isn’t really my place, like I don’t know what I’m supposed to say here.”

"That's okay. There is no right or wrong here."

Harvey scoffs. "It's a church, of course there is." The silence from the other side makes her realise she needs to watch her words now. "Oh, I'm sorry. It's just that—" She takes a deep breath. "I need help. And I don't really know how to approach this, because it's not really what I expected. Honestly, I don't even think I really expected anything." The other side is still quiet.

"My mom was a time traveller. Well, is, but she chose to not be a part of the community anymore. And so, I know, she's told me that that means we can never re-join, because leaving is the ultimate betrayal. So, I hope you don't call security before I get to say the rest." "Take a deep breath," he says calmly. "There is time."

"No pun intended," she murmurs and puts her face in her hands, folding over her lap. "I don't think I've ever felt this outside of myself." She swallows hard. It feels like she can't separate reality and imagination, just like that time in the water. "I'm desperate. I used to be a competitive swimmer; it was my life. They talked about my chances of making it into the Olympics. I never knew a life without sore shoulder and just constant wet hair. And then, at my last swim meet, everything was going so well, but then I couldn't focus right. It was like my thoughts were travelling through different dimensions. This voice took a hold of my head, and it taunted me until I suddenly transported off somewhere else. I wasn't where I was supposed to be anymore. Do you know what I mean?"

It takes a while before he says. "Where were you?"

"In the ocean", she answers quickly and adds. "I think."

"Floating in the middle of a body of water?" He questions confused.

"No, down in the deep."

"How far down were you?"

"I don't know." The never ending deep blue plays over her eyes. Goosebumps cover her arms as she slowly sinks deeper, just like it had two years earlier. "It was almost pitch black, only a speck of light far up over me."

"How long did you stay there?"

"Maybe twenty minutes. But when I returned to the pool, it was like only a few seconds had passed. And I had continued swimming in that time, as if I had been there the entire time."

He takes some time. "You were in the water for twenty minutes without breathing?"

"I know," She grows unsure, scared she has lost his attention, or that he doesn't believe her.

"I know it sounds hard to believe, but I," Harvey gnaws at her chipped nails. "When I was in there," she remembers the pain pulsing through her body. Her own faint, pained screams. She touches her throat. "I drowned. I remember for a few moments I was just... sinking. But then, there was this voice, taunting me. It told me I was fine. That I wasn't drowning like I thought. And even though I was still in a lot of pain, it was like I could breathe again." Her throat opens like it had that time, a heat suddenly coursing through her hands.

"What voice was this?" The lack of facial expressions makes her grow unwary, as she can't tell if he is annoyed with what she is saying or if he is actually trying to understand.

Harvey hunches forward and slides her hands back up to her face, trying to soothe herself as the pitch-black eyes once again find her in the dark. "I think it came from the one chasing me."

"Who chased you?" He sounds like he's sat at the tip of his chair.

"You're not going to believe me."

"Try."

She swallows and looks towards the tiny holes letting their words carry through to each other. "A shark."

He sucks in a deep breath and becomes quiet.

"It happened again a few weeks later." She feels a need to apologize for sharing this with him. "That time they found me floating lifeless in the pool. It killed me. Well, for a minute or so."

She continues in a plea. "Listen, I don't know a lot about this thing, but I'm one hundred percent sure this is where I need to be. So if you don't know how to answer my question, can you please find me someone who can?"

His voice comes out lighter than she expects. "And what exactly is your question?"

"What's happening to me?"

Uncertainty takes over Harvey's mind as she nervously twiddles her thumbs while awaiting the priest. She watches as her thumb overtakes the other and then reverses. The chipped red nail polish should have been taken off weeks ago, but she forgets every day. "Tomorrow before work," she reminds herself, knowing she probably won't. She sits in the front row in front of the altar. The light that had shone on the golden Jesus earlier is gone, and now Harvey thinks he could just as well be one of those golden elephant statues her mom has in their living room, and she wouldn't look twice. It's just a statue.

She shifts the weight in her neck from side to side and huffs, still waiting for the priest fifteen minutes later. Another ten minutes pass as she kicks her feet. The church has grown emptier with time, but there are still occasional visitors. They all have to pass by her for their prayer by the altar. On their way down, Harvey offers a shy smile, but they all look the other way, as if acknowledging each other is wrong. Her hand wanders over the Bibles on the seat next to her. They are bound in red leather with a sunken cross in the middle. It's soft against her fingers, and the cross is rough, as if the leather has been damaged by something sharp. Surprised, she lifts her hand. She didn't notice any damage there before, and still, the cross looks fine. Wonderingly, she moves her hand to a different Bible and finds it just as damaged.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting." An older voice from her left makes her jump up from her chair and catch her breath. The casual-looking man laughs wholeheartedly. He has a crown of short grey hair and a skin that has seen so many seasons it has started to jiggle.

"Forgive me, I did not mean to scare you."

"No, it's my fault, I'm a bit jumpy today." She reaches out a hand, "I'm Harvey Cold, thank you for seeing me."

"I'm priest Quinn, but please, call me Arthur." He reaches out a warm hand and squeezes hers reassuringly. His smile is so present, Harvey feels the knot in her chest loosen for a few moments. Arthur is wearing a burgundy piqué T-shirt, a white pair of khaki shorts, and a thick frame around his square glasses. Harvey wants to ask why he isn't in one of those long robes, then thinks better of it.

"Okay, Arthur." She nods and brings her hands back to her sides, falling into an unsure silence.

"I hear you have a special gift," he says and offers her a seat.

Harvey looks up to the altar at a woman on her knees, praying.

"It's okay," Arthur reassures, having already sat down. "No one's listening."

"I trust you know better than me," she mumbles and sits back down on the cushioned chair. Her legs have grown tired from all the sitting.

Harvey takes a deep breath, feeling like her brain takes a tumble as she figures out where to begin. "My mom is a time traveller. Well, she decided she didn't want to—"

Arthur holds up a quiet hand. "I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you, but Adrien already filled me in on some of the details. I'm really sorry to hear all the troubles you've had to go

through.” Harvey avoids the compassion he is trying to send her. “Can I ask you something? Have you ever travelled intentionally?”

She blinks. “No, I don’t know how.”

The priest smiles as if she just said she didn’t know how to breathe. “Then I will make sure you learn that soon.”

A beam of light appears in Harvey’s chest. “Really?” Arthur nods and smiles. “Now?”

He laughs again, reminding her more and more of someone grandfather. “With time. Tell me, did your mom ever teach you anything about our church.”

She shakes her head.

“That’s exciting. I myself would give anything to hear these stories for the first time again.”

His eyes proudly follow the images around the room. “In the Church of Time Harvey, we believe we were given the gift of time travel by God to create peace through the years with our alliances that branches through time for over five hundred years.”

“How so?”

Arthur shifts his weight in his seat excitedly. Despite his years he looks like he is ready to run a marathon from her questions. “In the Old Testament, God punished His people for their sins. But then in the New Testament, when He sacrificed His son on the cross, Jesus suffered so that God’s people no longer would have to. Does that sound familiar?”

She nods and casts a glance over at the golden statue as the words that had left her lips earlier: *‘Was it all in vain?’* “Yeah, it might ring a bell.”

“So, God’s plan after that was that we humans would live in peace from Him, but also with each other. When God gave His son to us, He sort of vowed to not interfere with us anymore. But as He sat back, He found Himself growing restless and hurt by the way we humans interact with each other. Remember, He created us in His image. Imagine seeing your own kids kill each other for power and glory.” This upsets him. “Since He couldn’t react with His initial instinct, anger He realized He was no longer mad at the people but sad. A deep-rooted sadness that He did not know what to do with. And this sadness reached its peak in the Early Middle Ages as Christianity spread throughout Europe. So many men of the church led with His words but acted in anger and hateful behaviour. People were oppressed and forced to believe in a God that they now only identified with pain. God was so close to flooding the world again, detoxing the world just one last time.” He points to a wall further back in the church, with a big sun and a rainbow hanging right below it.

“But where’s the water?” she asks as the ground underneath the rainbow is covered in fresh grass.

“The rainbow was a peace offering from God from the first flood. He promised to never hurt us like that again. He is the sun, and as His anger is about to play out on us, He is reminded by His own barrier. He could not do it.” There’s a faint smile on the priest’s lips as he admires the colourful rainbow.

“So, what did He do?” she asks, finding herself growing impatient with all these details. Is it really necessary?

Arthur turns to her with a glimmer in his eyes. “This is why we can travel.” He points to the other side of the room. Several men are standing in a crowd, looking up at an angel in the sky. On the way in, Harvey had seen them portrayed as the same person, but as she looks closer, she realizes they’re quite different. “Twelve men were given the gift of time. These were men who had all stood by their faith in dark times. They had passed the tests God had sent their way, and although they might have made some mistakes along the way, they had gone within themselves and asked for God’s forgiveness. These were the men He wished to represent Him. And He trusted them with something He couldn’t do anything with Himself: time.”

“That’s why we can travel in time?” The priest nods proudly. “How is that the same as a flood?”

“Because God cannot change time. Just like Mother Earth controls the weather, we control time. He created a world with limitations for Himself so that He could not be tempted by the power of ruling all. Time was the one element He had not given anyone responsibility for, and so our forefathers were trusted with that honor in hopes that if we had, let’s call it moral police, to check in on each other from different timelines, we can avoid the most brutal events taking place. Isn’t it amazing?”

Arthur’s enthusiasm is present, and it makes Harvey want to be as excited as him, but it’s just so much information at once. She’s still unsure if she can trust all he says. “What are they holding?” she asks, pointing to the objects in some of the men's hands. They all have long beards and long hair in different shades of colour. Their robes change from red and purple to blue and green, but they still look quite the same. The man closest to the angel has a pair of scissors in his hand, and the man behind him a book. One of the men further back in a teal robe holds a cross, but the hands of the man behind him are empty and his back is

turned towards them.

“Come,” he says and waves her with him. Arthur touches the air in front of the man turned away from the rest of the pack. “The loner, he wished to stay out of everyone’s way, so that no one could enter his space. That is why he faces away. His ultimate challenge is to travel in time and build alliances, so that his followers have a community through time that can help each other be better so we can live in a world free of pain. The man of God, a priest.” His fingers trace the cross. “His challenge was to stay by his good heart as a leading example for his next ones. One thing is telling others to be good, but one has to sacrifice oneself to create such an example that others will live to fill your shoes. The barber,” this time his hand only hovers over the object. Harvey looks between Arthur and the wall and realizes he had chosen to be the man with the cross. The words cling in her ears now, as she realizes just how important this is to them. For a flicker of a moment, she thinks of her mom in her work uniform. Tailored black blazer, pencil skirt, and pumps, her wild, red hair always tied back in a bun. To think these were the men she had heard of growing up, it didn’t add up. “His challenge was his vanity. He was lured in by anything beautiful and shied away from anything he thought visually impaired. On his travels, he was set to spread God’s message to the elder and sick. The only one of them to break God’s word.”

Harvey studies the man of vanities long blond hair and trimmed beard. “What do you mean?”

“For a long time, he had done exactly what he was set to do. He went back in time and sought out only the old and sick. But then, one day, as he entered a family farm to ask to speak to the eldest, he saw the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She was the only daughter of the house and her grandfather noticed that she liked the pretty preacher that came to teach them the importance of kind words and actions. Her grandfather was at first unsure of the worldly man that had taken into their beloved family estate. But as he returned every day for a whole month, bearing generous gifts every time, he finally offered the barber his beloved granddaughter in marriage in return for healthy grandchildren. They married while the barber secretly lived one life in his present and one in the past. And even though his admiration for his wife was as real as it comes, they could not bear children because past and present timelines do not mix. The two spouses died childless, grieving the life they could’ve lived. And that was the end of his family line.”

“How do you know he didn’t have kids in his time?” Harvey cocks her head to the side.

Arthur shakes his. "No one could match her beauty."

"But what about love?"

The priest smiles at her. "He never understood what that was."

She squints towards the painting as if she's missed an important detail. "Why do you say it as if it is a good thing?"

"Because you saw the hidden message in his quest." Harvey looks away shyly, not sure how to react to a stranger's praise. "You will fit right in here," he adds and pats her shoulder.

"So, what now?" she asks, crossing her arms over her chest. "How do I travel in time?"

The priest chuckles at her eagerness. "First, I think you should know more about the religion you are becoming a part of. How are you so sure you want to travel? He asks, nodding to the twelve men on the wall.

She looks over the painting. "I don't know. What do one do while traveling?"

The priest sighs as if it is too much to talk about in one day. "I think we have gone through enough in one day." Harvey opens her mouth to protest, but the priest holds up another silencing hand. "I want you to join our bible studies."

Her face falls, making the priest laugh. "I don't know Arthur." He walks over to the alter and brings her a folder with pictures of people sitting on the floor in a circle. "This isn't really my thing." She opens the paper and scratches the back of her neck. It reminded her of one of those cheap brochures bad amusement parks hands out to lure in their crowd.

"It's the only way for us to find out." A sympathetic look comes out in Arthur's eyes as he sees Harvey become more and more lost in everything he says. "What is your life usually like?"

She shrugs. "Well, for the summer I have an internship at Moss, I'm in marketing. So, a lot of call, parties, just growing a network really. Outside of that, I go to UNI here in London."

She shrugs as if it is nothing of a life.

Arthur takes her hand in his, giving her the same warmth he had when he first took it.

"Continue to live your life," he says reassuringly. "Then come see me here once in a while, and I will teach you everything you need to know."

The air hits her like a burning, brick wall as she exits the church. Despite the growing discomfort from the scorching heat, she gulps in the air as if it is fresh mountain water. She grabs the sides of her face and rubs her temples hard. The sinking feeling in her chest has

reached her stomach, and it gurgles uncomfortably underneath her sweater. She retches out loud, but there is no one around to hear it. A sour taste comes up her throat, making her gag and clutch her empty stomach. Finally, her body caves and she throw up falling to her knees. Her nails bend backwards as she scrapes them along the pavement. “Fuck,” she mumbles. The vomit leaves red wine stains from the night before. Maybe she should’ve have said yes to the food er father had offered. The cheese creeps its way into her memory making her gag once more. Deflated she looks up at the church she had hoped would be the answer to all her questions. *Continue living your life*, Harvey thinks in her haze. “Then what’s the point?”